Hampshire Services
SPECIALIST TEACHER ADVISORY SERVICE



Functional Communication Activities for Home

Here are some examples of developing functional communication through activities at home:

Create photo menus and stick them on the fridge, so that your child can request snacks or drinks, or help you create a shopping list of things you need. Photo menus could also be used for choices of board games, TV programmes, youtube clips, kitchen utensils – e.g. things you need for lunch/ breakfast, bathroom necessities for a shower etc.

Keep them near where the choices happen. You can use photos, or real items/ packaging. **This will help develop requesting**.

Use photo menus to comment and ask questions, not just to ask for things. You need to MODEL this. E.g. point to the photos to make a comment without expecting a response, just to model how to do it: "Hairbrush. I left my hairbrush upstairs", "Carrots. The rabbits like carrots", "Crisps. Do you want some crisps?".

We learn communication from other people modelling it, so every time you model using the photos you are helping develop that skill and showing them that you can communicate using the photos. Your child will not copy you straight away, but you are teaching them how to do it. **This will help develop understanding, commenting, asking and answering questions.**

Go on a scavenger hunt to find items on a list. When your child has found them, sort the out into categories – things for cooking, things for brushing teeth, or more detailed categories e.g. sorting out a wardrobe – winter clothes/ summer clothes. **This will help with vocabulary and naming/ describing words.**

Put items in a box or a bag without letting your child see what it is. Give clues about it and see if they can guess what it is e.g. it comes from the kitchen, its made of wood, we use it for stirring. Let your child hide something for you in the bag and see if they can give you clues! **This helps listening, understanding, vocabulary, describing skills and being able to understand someone else's point of view (i.e. you don't know what it is!).**

Make use of tasks in everyday living and life skills. This might include:

- Washing the dishes
- Unloading the dishwasher
- Cooking pasta
- Making toast
- Cleaning the kitchen
- Grooming the dog
- Brushing teeth

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Here are some examples of developing functional communication through activities at home:

Sending a thank you or birthday card

Doing the laundry

Watering house plants

Find the vocabulary (words) you need for each of the tasks. Take photos, use real objects or find pictures of the words for each activity. See if your child can sort out the objects/ photos into the appropriate categories e.g find all the words to do with laundry and put them in the laundry basket, all those to do with making toast and put them on a plate. **This will help develop understanding and use of functional words.**

Take photos showing each step of an everyday task. Get your child to identify each of the steps when you ask them "where is…putting in the plug, turning on the taps" etc. Muddle the photos up so they have to put them in the right order- you can adjust this to your child's level of understanding – 2 steps, 3 steps, 4 steps etc.

If this is difficult, help them by finding the first steps for them and let them add just the last one to complete the sequence. Gradually add less – all but the last 2, all but the last 3 etc so they work from the last item backwards. This is called "backward chaining" and is a great way to learn any new task without failure! **This will help develop understanding, commenting, re-telling and sequencing.**

Make a recipe book of "how to…" for each activity. Get them to direct you to do it or point to the step if they cannot physically assist or say it. Get them to re-tell what they did to someone else. Problem solve together – so if they say "put the pasta in the pan" – put the unopened packet in. "What do we need to do first?"

Use words like: "first", "next" to develop understanding of these concepts. To develop their language, model and repeat back expanding on what they said. For example if they say "Pan" you can say "Yes – put it in the pan". **This will help develop understanding, commenting, sequencing and giving directions to others.**

Do something silly! "Forget" to provide something that is needed to complete a task such as hiding the tea towel when you've asked them to dry up, or miss out a step such as giving them a sealed packet of pasta that they cannot open. Provide the wrong utensil – e.g. ask them to butter the toast but only provide a fork.

Set it up so that your child has to initiate communication- they have to ask you for help or tell you something is wrong. Sometimes we leave no reason for the young person to communicate because we anticipate their needs too much. Try to hold out until they ask, rather than offering help! Make sure you only do this in a fun way. It is not intended to



Functional Communication Activities for Home

Here are some examples of developing functional communication through activities at home:

make the person angry or frustrated. **This will help develop problem solving, initiation and asking questions.**

Make a scrap book or photo album. This can be with photos or real things that you collect to make it a sensory experience, or a digital version if you have a phone/ iPad. If you go for a walk you might find things that remind you of particular points in the walk – fir cones, sticks, stones, leaves, sand. Use it to talk about the walk and remember/ re-tell what they did to someone else. **This helps memory, recall and expressive language.**

Extend to more complex communication tasks if appropriate:

e.g. for Cooking or baking – get together all the ingredients you are using to make dinner and name them, talk about them.

See if your child can guess what is being made or what you could make with them. This is called inferencing – **using information to understand beyond what is immediately apparent.**

Ask them – "what would you do if…? You saw smoke coming out of the oven/ you dropped the egg/ you hurt yourself/ Mum hurt herself etc . **This is helping problem solving and being able to predict what might happen**

Get them to describe the food with more challenging words – spicy/ sour/ sweet/ delicious/ sticky. Think of other words that means the same **to expand their vocabulary.**

Extend to more complex communication tasks if appropriate:

e.g. for music – listen carefully to a song together

See if they know what instruments are being played, what type of music is it, how does it make you feel, what does it make you think about, what do the words mean? **This is a good opportunity to explore and describe emotions.**